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Wounded Service Members Arrive at Bethesda
By Journalist 2nd Class (SW) Hendrick L. Dickson, Navy
News Service

BETHESDA, Md. - A number of service members wounded or injured during Operation Iraqi Freedom recently arrived at the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda, Md. Five patients were received March 28 and an additional 10 arrived March 30.

According to Capt. David W. Ferguson, Medical Corps, director of surgical and clinical care services at NNMC, 14 of the 15 patients being treated are Marines, and the other one is a Navy corpsman. Ferguson said a couple of patients are now outpatients, some are recovering in the surgical ward and two of the injured, a Marine and the Navy corpsman, are being treated in the intensive care unit. Those two are in serious but stable condition and are expected to make a full recovery.

In a press conference held March 31, three of the wounded Marines who arrived at NNMC March 28 talked publicly about their experience and feelings on the war for the first time since returning home.

Lt. Col. John Ewers, a staff judge advocate for 1st Marine Division in Camp Pendleton, Calif., was shot when his group was ambushed during a humanitarian mission in southern Iraq. Ewers said coalition forces seemed very motivated and determined to accomplish their mission.

"I think the morale of every man and woman out there is tremendously high," he said. "It's just an incredible and fine group of young men and women we have over there."

Lance Cpl. Joel Norman, a Chicago native assigned

to the 1st Marine Division in Camp Pendleton, cut several tendons in his wrist when he broke a window in an attempt to access a room in a building his unit was clearing in southern Iraq.

Norman said he was taken aback by the experience of having the opportunity to help liberate the Iraqi people from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

"It [the experience] was more than I expected," he said. "I never thought I would get a chance to go out into the world to protect and fight for freedom for those who didn't have it."

Cpl. Brent Gross, an Austin, Texas, native and machine gunner from Alpha Company 15, also of the 1st Division in Camp Pendleton, was wounded when he stepped on a landmine while clearing bunkers on a mission in southern Iraq.

Neither of the Marines will be able to return to duty in Iraq, and for Gross, that news seemed more difficult for him to deal with than the numerous surgeries and months of rehab he will have to endure before he will completely recover from his injury. Gross said he belongs with his unit, and it was disheartening for him not to be with them.

"They told me I'm not going back," Gross said somberly. "That really upset me... I believe I need to be out there with my unit. I've got a squad out there to lead, and I've got a squad out there to protect and I promised them that I will bring them all back alive, and now I'm not out there to make sure that's possible."

All three men received the Purple Heart, awarded to service members who are wounded or killed in battle during time of conflict, but it did not seem to take their thoughts away from the fellow Marines and service members continuing the fight in Iraq.

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Rota's Fleet Hospital 8 Receives First Combat Casualties
By Chief Journalist (SW) Dan Smithyman, Naval Station
Rota, Spain, Public Affairs

ROTA, Spain - Seven injured service members arrived for treatment at Fleet Hospital (FH) 8 aboard Naval Station Rota recently.

Five of the seven are being treated for combat-related injuries, while the other two are being treated for non-combatant injuries or illnesses.

Capt. Pat Kelly, Medical Service Corps, FH-8 commanding officer, explained the service members, who represent the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, are all in stable condition and will remain in Rota until they are well enough to return to the Central Command area of operation or to the United States.

"The combat casualties are primarily shrapnel or bullet wound casualties," Kelly said. "Some may require

surgical intervention, but they are all stable at this time."

FH-8 was opened Feb. 24 at Naval Station Rota to provide medical support for Operation Enduring Freedom and the global war on terrorism. The hospital is a modular, rapid-assembly facility that supports a variety of operational scenarios, including humanitarian operations.

"The field hospital has all the same specialty care and services (as a fixed hospital). It has the same number of operating rooms, the same type of nursing support service, the same, and in some cases many more, intensive care units," Kelly said. "So the fact that this hospital is not made of brick and mortar does not compromise the quality of care. The infection control rates are the same or better, so there's no compromise based on the fact that this hospital is put up in tents."

The hospital is designed to provide advanced medical and surgical care following treatment at forward operation areas and is a waypoint for patients to transit to medical facilities located in the continental United States or back to their originating units.

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Kearsarge, Fleet Surgical Team 8 Prepare for War
By Journalist 1st Class (SW) Chris Hoffpauir, USS
Kearsarge Public Affairs

ABOARD USS KEARSARGE, At Sea - A fair definition of a mass casualty scene is "organized chaos."

Recently, USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) conducted two back-to-back mass casualty drills to flex a capability that the ship has not fully implemented.

Stretchers bearing simulated wounded Sailors and Marines were lined up on the flight deck, arranged in a neat line near the island, as hospital corpsmen quickly assessed the simulated injuries.

The casualties are quickly moved, through massive, armored, double doors into the ship's flight deck triage room, just inside the island. The place was a swarm of activity, with doctors quickly performing primary triage, prioritizing patients according to the severity of their injuries and how urgently they needed care.

From there, stretcher bearers move the wounded to one of the ship's battle dressing stations or main medical, via an elevator, for further treatment or surgery.

The stress level among the medical professionals was high. Of course, it would have been even higher were the casualties real. The event was held the day before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Kearsarge is deployed in the Arabian Gulf as part of Task Force 51 and boasts a medical capability second

only to the Navy's two dedicated hospital ships, USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) and USNS Comfort (T-AH 20).

Currently, Comfort is deployed in the Arabian Gulf with Kearsarge and is routinely seen in the vicinity of the ship. As a result of its robust medical capabilities, Kearsarge is designated as a primary casualty receiving and treatment ship (CRTS).

"Today was a training exercise for handling a large number of casualties," said Capt. Mary Jean Herden, officer in charge, Fleet Surgical Team (FST) 8. "We purposely overloaded the system to test how well we can deal with a mass casualty situation."

"We wanted to present a realistic situation and expose everyone to the kinds of stresses they would see in a real-world mass casualty situation," Herden added.

Kearsarge's core medical department includes doctors, one administrative officer and hospital corpsmen. The embarkation of a fleet surgical team adds medical command and control, surgical and medical specialty-trained doctors, nurses and corpsmen to the CRTS platform. FST-8 originally left Norfolk aboard USS Bataan (LHD 5) to complete the task of training a task-oriented surgical team for that ship.

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Dental Technicians Celebrate Anniversary

By Aveline V. Allen, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

WASHINGTON - Bravo Zulu! Happy birthday to Navy Medicine's dental technicians as they celebrate 55 years of dedicated and caring service. They are a force of 3,198 active duty and 567 reservists strong who work to provide the best dental health service by improving the dental health of Navy military members and their families.

Dental technicians support Navy Medicine both ashore and in the field.

"We have approximately 208 dental technicians in support of Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle," said Master Chief Dental Technician Barbara L. Moody, dental technician career planner at the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

While these dental technicians serve abroad in support of our country, those at home are working on ways to improve Navy Medicine dental health.

"We are working on producing increased efficiency in how we do business," said Moody. She explains they hope to achieve this goal by implementing billet sharing on a trial basis within the hospital corpsman and dental technician community.

"This will significantly increase career opportunities and improve utilization of senior enlisted leaders," said Moody. "Additional benefits of this initiative will be stronger, more diverse personnel

resources which will allow the sharing of talents and expertise across the lines."

Many dental technicians serve in different specialty areas such as administration, dental laboratory technician-basic, dental laboratory technician-advanced, surgical technologist, maxillofacial technician, dental equipment repair, field medical service, and dental hygienist.

DTs are assigned to shore-based facilities around the globe, aboard ships, and with the Marines and Seabees.

"Dental Technicians have always been extremely proud of our contribution to Navy Medicine, and, this initiative will make better use of our unique talents, make us a more integral part of the Navy Medicine team, and enhance Navy Medicine's mission of Force Health Protection," said Moody.

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Fisher House Helps Get Messages to "Wounded Heroes" From Bureau and Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

WASHINGTON - Since the first reports of casualties from Operation Iraqi Freedom, many people have asked how they can send messages to wounded service members. The public can now go online to send get well wishes to wounded service members, thanks to a partnership among the military, Fisher House Foundation and Caring Bridge.

By going to www.fisherhouse.org and clicking on "Message to Our Wounded Heroes", anyone can send a note of encouragement and gratitude that can be read by a service member who has been wounded or injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom. In cooperation with the military's medical departments, patients at any military medical facility with access to the Internet will be able to view the messages and respond to them.

Fisher House, which builds and operates "comfort homes" at all major military medical centers, previously used the Caring Bridge service to help families stay in touch online when loved ones are hospitalized.

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HSO Jax Sailors Lend "Buddy Support" At Special Olympics By JOC Bill Austin, Naval Hospital Jacksonville Public Affairs

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - During a time when our nation bravely fights in war, a celebration of sorts took place recently under sunny Florida skies.

On March 22, Sailors from the Naval Healthcare Support Office (HSO) rallied together to lend helping hands for the 2003 Special Olympic Games held at Jacksonville's Ed White High School. It was a day filled with heartwarming ear-to-ear smiles.

Over 900 volunteers from NAS Jacksonville and surrounding communities provided their time for a well-planned day which included all kinds of field sports such as the long jump, softball throw and several running events.

"Our volunteers really did a fine job here, and made this day a huge success," said Diane Parker, who serves as the base community service coordinator and organizer of the games.

"Being able to participate in this event really made my day, said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Ivan Menendez. "Just take a look at the smiles on these faces," he added as he pointed towards a group of athletes.

Navy Medicine representatives could be seen everywhere. NAS Jacksonville's Branch Dental Clinic, for example, drew huge participation inside their dental tent.

"This is our Special Smiles program," said Lt. Cmdr. Rick Freedman, Dental Corps. "We are conducting dental screenings for the athletes, go over some brushing tips, and best of all, give away some goodie bags," he said.

At the end of the day, enthusiasm from the audience to the athletes was still in full tilt. Even as the athletes boarded their busses, high fives were being "slapped" and shouts of victory filled the huge grounds of the high school.

Perhaps the best description of the games came from HSO's Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Kathy McBride. When asked how she felt about being part of such a big event, she didn't hesitate at all. "The drive and the energy these athletes have should be an inspiration to all of us. I was really proud to be part of this," said McBride.

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Naval Hospital Jacksonville Breaks Ground for Satellite Pharmacy

By Marsha Childs, Naval Hospital Jacksonville

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - Naval Hospital Jacksonville Commanding Officer Capt. Ralph Lockhart and Pharmacy Officer Cmdr. Mark Brouker, Medical Service Corps, and other honored guests broke ground March 11 on a new satellite pharmacy slated for construction near the NAS Jacksonville Navy Exchange.

The new pharmacy will fill all prescriptions generated by civilian providers. In addition, the pharmacy will be the site for the pickup of refill prescriptions. It will offer either drive through or walk-in options for the pickup of refill prescriptions.

"This is a win-win all the way around - it's a win for the hospital, the Navy Exchange and, most

importantly, the patient," said Lockhart, who pushed for this innovative and customer friendly service. "It will increase foot traffic for the exchange, decrease foot traffic at the hospital, increase parking availability at the hospital and make pharmacy services more convenient for our customers."

The expected opening date of the new pharmacy is September 2003.

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Keep Your Eyes on Your Health Care Regimen
By Aveline V. Allen, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

WASHINGTON - Maintaining your family's eye health is just as important as caring for your entire physical well being. A comprehensive eye exam can reveal information about your general health, according to the American Optometric Association (AOA). It can detect chronic diseases such as glaucoma and diabetes. You should also be aware that eye examinations could reveal eye health problems, general health issues and possible vision difficulties.

"Many people go to their doctor and read the eye chart and have their eye looked into briefly and qualify this as an eye exam," said Cdr. Dale Barrette, Medical Service Corps, assistant specialty leader for Navy optometry.

He explains that a more in-depth exam by a optometry specialist is what is needed.

"An optometrist is a primary care provider who evaluates your personal and family health history, performs vision tests to determine visual acuity, ocular alignment and examines the inside of your eye to gain insight into your overall health as well as determine eye health during a comprehensive eye exam," said Barrette.

As a parent you can follow the timeline provided by the AOA to monitor when your children should have a comprehensive eye exam.

-Children 6 months old and 3 years old should have an eye exam before starting school, and then every two years after that,

-18 to 40 years old, every two to three years,

-41 to 60 years old, every two years,

-60 years old and over, every year.

However, if specific problems arise, you should have your child see the eye doctor more often.

Parents should also observe their children for possible eye-related symptoms, which may lead to a serious vision problem. According to the AOA, if infants and preschoolers exhibit certain habits such as avoiding coloring, puzzles or detailed activity, or bump into objects or cannot judge distances, this may be a sign that they should have an eye examination.

Experts agree that since children grow and develop so quickly, their eyesight can have an important impact on their development and learning ability.

"Eighty percent of what students learn is through vision, and yet 86 percent of children who enter school have not had a complete eye examination," said Barrette. "Keep in mind, a school vision screening, while helpful, is not a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination."

As you take care of your children's eye health, do not neglect your own eyesight. The AOA suggest certain habits may contribute to eye problems. Adults should be aware if they are at risk for certain eye diseases because of:

- a family history or related factor,
- experience frequent headaches after working on a computer,
- rubbing your eyes a lot or having tired or burning eyes.

The preservation and protection of your family's eye health is paramount to a healthy lifestyle. You may obtain additional information on eye health at www.aoa.org.

Editor's note: March was Save Your Vision month.

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